A STUDY ON SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG UTM STUDENTS

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I declare that this project entitled ‘A Study on Second Language Speaking Anxiety Among UTM Students’ is the result of my own research except as cited in the references.

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ABSTRACT

A study was carried out to determine the perceptions of University Technology Malaysia students towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when speaking in the second language. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to investigate students’ anxiety level towards speaking English as a second language and to identify the types of speaking activities that caused high anxiety level among the students. Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and general feeling of anxiety were among the factors studied in the research. The instrument used for the study was adapted from Horwitz’s (1983) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The questionnaire consists of 32 items, each one on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS version 10.0 Windows and were represented in the form of descriptive statistics which include percentages and mean. Results from the study show that students experienced moderate level of anxiety.
ABSTRAK

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UTM : Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

FKKKSA : Faculty of Chemical and Natural Resources Engineering

FKSG : Faculty of Geoinformation Science and Engineering

CA : Communication Apprehension
CHAPTER I

1.0 Introduction

English is the language of international communication and it is widely used in Malaysia. It is anticipated that with the trend of globalization, this country will face more stiff competition from other foreign countries. Thus, Malaysian students should be well equipped with a solid education foundation and in training to remain competitive; including the ability to communicate in English. As a second most important language in Malaysia, English is extensively used in education system from the primary up to tertiary level. It is also widely used in various professions such as the medical, engineering, legal and business. Therefore, it is very crucial for Malaysian students to be proficient in English so that they can use the language efficiently for academic purposes and later in professional setting.

At the tertiary level, the implementation of English as a medium of instruction in teaching and learning process require students to use the language extensively. They usually use English for academic purposes such as listening to lectures, preparing assignments, making oral presentations and reading materials that are related to their field. Most academic books and online resources especially in the field of science and technology are in English. Therefore, in order to be successful in studying, students need to acquire the second language.
Students who are proficient in English will have better chances to be employed by multinational companies after they have graduated. It is because the employers do not simply look at their excellent academic results but also their proficiency in the second language. Companies nowadays do not only select the best graduates who can deliver technical skills but also those that possess soft skills. These soft skills include the ability to communicate in English effectively. In fact, even job interviews are now conducted in English. Thus, confidence in speaking is very important to graduates because it can prove that they are the suitable candidate for the job.

In a nutshell, English becomes the second most important language to the students. It is because they need to master the language in order to excel in their study and to prepare them for the competitive job market. They have to compete with other graduates who not only have good academic qualifications but also good communication skills in English. Employers will choose the best candidates who are proficient in English to meet the demands of globalization.
1.1 Background of problem

In University of Technology Malaysia (UTM), as far as English language learning is concerned, focus is given to the mastery of second language for academic purposes. The implementation of English as a medium instruction in class requires the students to have good foundation in the second language so that they can perform well in their study. The Department of Modern Languages in UTM has designed English language programme in order to help students to improve their English language skills.

The department aims to develop in students the knowledge and skills needed to use language appropriately and effectively for academic and occupational purposes. Besides that, the department hopes to equip students with skills to acquire and use relevant information for various purposes, to inculcate confidence in using language in various situations and lastly to provide students with the opportunities to work collaboratively as a team.

The Department of Modern Languages has also outlined several learning outcomes for the English programme. By the end of the programme, students should be able to participate with confidence in a wide range of written and spoken communicative activities, use a range of spoken and written expressions appropriate to audience and purposes. In addition, students should know how to extract, analyse and evaluate relevant information independently from a variety of sources, to recognize the information in different written or oral modes for specific purposes and finally to convey ideas and information clearly and effectively in both written and spoken form.

There are 10 English courses that are offered by the Department of Modern Languages. Some of the courses are English for Academic Communication, Proficiency Skills in English, Advanced English for Academic Communication, Reading for Specific Purposes and Effective Oral Communication. It is compulsory for students to
attend the English courses. However, for final year students, they are given choice to take the English class that they are interested in. The language proficiency courses are very important to the students in helping them to improve their English especially in communication skills.

Many students believe that second language class can increase their anxiety level. Some of the students maybe have excellent academic background but for them they feel that anxiety can prevent them to achieve desired goals in English. According to Spielberger (1983) anxiety is the subject feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Just as anxiety hinders the successful performance in learning science or mathematics, many students find second language learning, especially in classroom situations, particularly stressful.

Besides, in the context of language learning, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) stated that anxiety can negatively affect learning or performance. Anxiety can be seen as the major factor that prevents students to speak another language. For ESL students, learning the second language is challenging because the language is different from their native language and they do not use the language in their daily communication. Thus, teachers should acknowledge the existence of anxiety especially in language learning and teaching.

In English class, there are various types of activities that involve speaking in second language such as small group discussions, oral presentations, public speaking, debates and many more. Some ESL learners believe that communicating with other people in English language can be stressful. As stated by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) anxiety maybe strongly aroused by speaking. It is because learners are expected by the teachers to speak in the second language even though they do not acquire fluency in the language. It makes them feel anxious in speaking as they tend to focus on mistakes and reactions that they will get from the other learners.
Therefore, this study is conducted to determine students’ perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language and to investigate students’ anxiety levels towards speaking English as a second language. In addition, this research also intends to identify the types of speaking activities that can trigger high anxiety level among students.
1.2 Statement of Problem

UTM students need to use English extensively for their academic purposes. Most of the academic books are in English and some of the subjects are taught in English. Moreover, the use of English as the medium of instruction in class, require students to be proficient in the second language. Despite having learned English for 11 years in schools, students still have difficulty to use the language effectively.

Most of students have problem in speaking the second language especially in the English class. It can be more stressful when they are expected to speak in the second language before the fluency is achieved. Krashen, who was interviewed by Young (1992) stated that speaking can cause high anxiety level and the reason for this is that teachers often expect beginners to perform beyond their acquire competence. In early stages, the teacher force learners to break the silent period before they are ready and they have to use aspects of language that they have not yet subconsciously acquired. As a result, learners will show poor speaking performance because they are not competent in using the target language.

A student who believes that one must never say anything in English until it can be said correctly will probably avoid speaking most of the time. Indeed, some learners prefer to keep quiet during English lesson because they are reluctant to speak in English. Anxious learners tend to think about negative evaluations from other people and the situation becomes worse if they cannot control their anxiety. In order to overcome this problem, teachers should make learning context less stressful for students and use suitable teaching methods that can help learners to minimize their anxiety feelings in second language classroom.

Every learner has his or her own experience in anxiety especially in language learning. Teacher should help learners to cope with anxiety because it can prevent them to perform well in the second language. Thus in this study, the researcher wants to
determine students’ perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language and to investigate student’s anxiety levels towards speaking English as a second language. In addition, this study also intends to identify the type of activities that can cause high anxiety level in speaking.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study are to determine students’ perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language and to investigate students’ anxiety level towards speaking English as a second language. Besides, the researcher also wants to identify the types of speaking activities that can trigger high anxiety level especially in learning context. The findings from this study will provide students with better understanding on second language speaking anxiety and help them to minimize the problem. In addition, teachers can get an overall view on the real situation that happens in the English class. It will help teachers to acknowledge the existence of second language anxiety especially in speaking and the types of activities that can cause high anxiety level.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

(i) to determine students’ perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language.

(ii) to investigate students’ anxiety level towards speaking English as a second language.

(iii) to identify the types of speaking activities that can cause high anxiety among the students.
1.5 Research Questions

(i) What are students’ perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language?

(ii) What are students’ anxiety levels towards speaking English as a second language?

(iii) What are the types of speaking activities that can cause high anxiety level among the students?